



SWINGTIME NEWS

South Florida Swing Dance Society Newsletter

Summer Newsletter
August 2011

The SFSDS moves to the Hollywood Moose Lodge!

Over the last year our dances have been growing and it was a matter of time before we needed to expand with it. We have been given an opportunity to move, but we needed a large enough dance floor to accomodate our growth in dancers...

With the financial help and carpentry knowledge of some of our members we are able to move our dance to the Hollywood Moose Lodge. With a larger dance floor and they even have a billard room with slot machines.

On Saturday, August 13th, we were able to complete Phase 1 and **now we get to work together as a TEAM to complete the dance floor in preparation of our September 17th dance. We'd love to see all of you at our new home!**

This past Saturday at our last dance at the GAC we gave away envelopes with a raffle ticket to each guest and member...We have some awesome giveaways that you need to be present to win!

We are tweaking the newsletter as it goes and would encourage your feedback. We're looking forward to your comments at: sfsdsDance@aol.com.

Also, we would like to begin our "What's Going On in Our Neighborhood" article again. If you have any info to share about marriages, passings, illnesses, etc...please direct all your emails to: sunshinelady080@aol.com or sfsdsDance@aol.com.

Support the Swing Dance Venues-A Point of View by Benson Wong - www.havetodance.com

Having been in the local swing dance scene since 1991, I've been able to check out a fair number of swing dance opportunities in an around the Greater Boston area. Unfortunately, I've also been around when we've lost some of those dancing venues. For

instance, the Winikers used to play from 8 to 9 pm at Zanzibar's in Boston on Saturday night before the Disco crowd came in. The Veronique Ballroom used to offer swing dancing to a live band every Thursday night. At some point, the Bay Tower Room asked to be de-listed from the Boston Swing Dance Society and DanceNet Calendars. How many of us used to go swing dancing at the Juke Box with all the free tickets (100 at a time)?

What do all of these places have in common? They are commercial establishments (meaning that they are out to make money) and they depended on getting enough cash flow through the bar to pay for the live music presented. What's the problem? Dancers Don't Drink!! I'll be the last person who will advocate dancing while drinking. I've tried doing a spin/turn at the Bay Tower Room years ago after half a glass of wine; it wasn't pretty. Dancers are more likely to drink water more than anything else. Many partners don't like "alcohol breath".

The need for the clubs to make money and the desire for the dancers to dance to live music should not be mutually exclusive, but this always appears to be the issue when a dance venue closes down and it doesn't have to be the case. For example, Johnny D's in Somerville has been offering live music every Monday night for years now and seems to appreciate the swing dancers. On the other hand, the Owner (or manager) of the Indian Meadows Country Club in Westboro just got into an argument with a dancer (the sister of a prominent dance teacher) over the right of the club to restrict outside beverages and the right of the dancer to bring in her own water. As a result of that argument, the manager of the country club declared that there would be no more swing dancing there. The dancers had to move elsewhere.

If a commercial club offers swing dancing to live music, you should take the opportunity to visit that place and use the dance floor. I also suggest at the same time, that you remember that the club needs to make money on the event; the cover charge may or may not pay for the band. But at least one drink at the bar. Tell the bartender to "go easy on the booze" if you don't like to drink much.

Personal Space

...or **Guys who grope...and the women who have to dance with them!**

One of the interesting benefits of running **DanceNet** is that I get to meet a lot of different and interesting people,



The Guys are loading in the Floor into the Hollywood Moose Lodge



Volunteers on August 13, 2011



Loading the floor into a corner to get acclimated at the HML

Dancecraft and Floorcraft: The Intellectual Side of Dance

The wooden floor is huge,

particularly the women since I'm a "leader" and rarely dance with guys. Because I have this public forum for talking about my views on the dance scene and hopefully because I'm not doing what these women are complaining about, I get to hear some interesting (though sometimes discouraging) stories about things that bother the women while they dance with [other] guys in the dance community.

Have you had someone get too friendly with you? Are you someone who ignores personal boundaries? This article was written with you in mind.

One of my friends came back from a dance completely outraged at some of the men at a recent dance because she felt like several of the guys "groped" her while dancing. She said that there were "a lot of sleazy guys" there. This is not a unique story, as I have heard similar stories from other women over the years... Horror stories from some of the ladies:

- **Chest-mashing.** A certain young lady complained to me about guys who pull them in too close so they could rub against her chest.
- **The Hip Spin.** There's some move where the guy allegedly puts his hands on his partner's hips and sends her off into a spin. Some guys have either missed the lesson or decided to "make a mistake" by putting their hands on the woman's stomach and back to make her "spin".
- **The Butt Roll.** I remember one woman was complaining about this because some teacher (I think it was a visiting Lindy teacher) taught a move that involved a back-to-back position where the leader would move from one side to the other and the move required both partners' rear-ends to be in contact.
- **The Butt Push.** This comes out of a tandem charleston position

smooth, and poleless, but not slippery; there are only a few other couples on the dance floor; the air conditioning is cranked up, like the music; and every partner you dance with knows all the same steps, which you both do perfectly....

WAKE UP! This is your local club, not dance heaven! We hear a lot about technique, frame, style, and execution, which are all important physical aspects of becoming better dancers as individuals. But, not everyone wants to work that hard on their dancing. What most of us would like to be are popular partners. To do that, we must work on the intellectual aspects of dancing, what I call **dancecraft**-your interaction with your partner and the music, and **floorcraft**-your interaction with the size and quality of the floor, and other couples on it. The basic idea behind **DANCECRAFT** is to make the partnership look good. How do you do that? Glad you asked....

First, dance to the music: Is the song bouncy, smooth, upbeat, slinky, or down and dirty? Your dancing should look different as the music changes, not just from fast to slow songs, but from 50's be-bop to 90's swing. Feel the music.

Second, dance with your partner: Followers should style to match their leaders. Some people have a smooth, upright, ballroom style; others have a get-down, funky look to their dancing. Match attitudes, and you'll look like you belong together on the dance floor. Smile at your partner.

Third, dance appropriate steps: Remember that unfollowed leads reflect just as badly on the leader as the follower. With an unfamiliar partner, begin with basics, then try fancier steps; don't start out with your entire repertoire of workshop combinations. Since a couple only looks as good as the worst partner, showing off doesn't work; a few well-executed underarm turns look better than one messy whip. Also, as the music gets faster, some steps are more difficult--save them for a slower song.

Fourth, keep moving but don't keep going: If a specific step is not working-a lead was missed, a turn delayed-don't continue to drag your partner through it, because it probably won't work. Instead turn the move into something more basic, then lead

where the man/leader is suppose to put his hand on the follower's/woman's hip, shoulder, or small-of-her-back to push her out to an open position but instead, the guy will put his hand on her rear-end to push her out.

Every women has her own personal space which she does not want violated. An acceptance to an invitation to dance is not permission to feel or grope your partner (I can't believe I even have to say what is obviously common sense, though I suppose "common sense" is really an oxymoron and not that common). Some women ***might*** prefer a closer dancing position, but it's the woman's decision to allow the closeness, not the man's. Also, one person's (a man's, for instance) thoughts on what constitutes "groping" or just "part of the dance" may very well differ from that of another person's view (the woman's, for example). It's the woman's/follower's opinion that's important here.

At least one woman indicated that she was less upset about the incident itself than the attitude (see above) that "because this is dancing, it's okay." When a woman accepts a dance, she pretty much agrees to let him touch her back, hands and arms; *that's it*. The rest of her is reserved for people whom she might know better, and even then, the other person should know her limits and obey them.

"...but hey! I saw those competitors at that championship do that move!" Right. Perhaps those people did get a little risque on purpose to catch your attention while performing or competing; however, they are couples who have practiced those moves with each other and agreed that it's okay. It's not an approval for leaders to do these moves with strangers. Some of these moves might be funny or amusing, but only when there's an appropriate rapport between the dance partners. And one more thing, when you see performers do

something else. When all else fails, bring your partner back to closed and start again. Don't just stop. keep it interesting: No matter how many or how few steps you know, mix them up.

Fifth, don't do the same pattern every dance. Only do a couple of the same step in a row. Add a double spin for a follower that likes to spin. Be unpredictable in your choreography (but not in your lead!). Be prepared for whatever the leader asks, and go for it.

Sixth, here are a few pointers from an article, ***How to Become a Lousy Dancer*** by Kelly Gellette, National Teachers Association, published in *Country Dance Lines*, May 1992.

- Learn 100 turns/moves before perfecting the basics.
- Dance with the same partner all the time.
- Never attend a class.
- Never do the basic moves.
- Don't bother to learn the basics well.
- Be oblivious to your partner.
- Forget that confidence and assurance come with knowledge and practice.
- Never practice.
- Dance your competition routines on the social dance floor.
- Be sure to tell everyone how wonderful you are. The basic idea behind **FLOORCRAFT** is to make dancing fun for everyone on the floor, and to prevent injuries. There are a few underlying principles of floorcraft that govern your movement on the floor.

First, beginners (like sailboats) always have right of way on the floor: Therefore, collisions are usually the fault of the more advanced couple. Why is this so? Think back to when you first started dancing. How well could you maintain even the basic step? How easily could you change directions? As advanced dancers, we should be able to alter our course, manoeuver around obstacles, change steps midstream, create "lines" that look like we meant to stop and pose. We have more control over our dancing and therefore should yield right of way to those who do not.

Second, the couples around you have squatters rights: They own the space they are presently in; you can't have it until they move. Watch where you send your partner!

Third, the only space you can claim is

these touchy-feely moves, are they really touching or are they pretending to?

Some minor suggestions to keep you out of trouble:

- In a closed position, the woman/follower determines the space between her and her partner. The man/leader will set up the frame and the woman/follower will move into the position in which she is comfortable and then the man can close the frame depending on where the woman is standing. The man should **NOT** then move to make the frame closer.
- If the guy's [right] hand is on her back, he should keep the hand lower so that if she has to spin or turn, his hand won't go near her upper torso.
- If a man is dancing with a woman for the first time, any move that might involve bodily contact other than between the hands should be thought out carefully or deferred until he gets to know the woman better. There is absolutely no excuse for chest-mashing or putting the hands near the followers' chest, rear-end, legs, or any other body part where she might consider off-limits. If you don't know for sure, don't do it. The short-term thrill is not worth the long-term black-listing that you'll get among the followers. If a man/leader doesn't think he'll get a bad reputation from man-handling women on the dance, then he's pretty damn stupid. The women talk and they compare notes on who are the good dancers and who are the ones to stay away from.
- If a sincere mistake was made, **apologize** right away! And don't do it again. First-time mistakes can be forgiven. Do not assume that new dancers are more forgiving about these mistakes. The better dancers will not tolerate bad behavior and will not dance with

under your own rear end: Your feet should not be out from under your body; weight should only be transferred to a foot if the body is above it. Therefore, if you are often stepping on other people, you are invading their space by stepping beyond your own; if you are getting stepped on, you are probably leaving your feet exposed by having them beyond your body. Part of the reason for maintaining a broad frame with your upper body is to create a wider space between couples on the floor.

Fourth, check out the floor conditions: Are you dancing on wood, linoleum, cement, tile, carpet? Choose your steps according to how easily your feet glide on the floor. Don't try to double spin your partner unless there's a little slip to the floor; otherwise you could end up with twisted ankles, pulled arms, or wrenched knees. At the other extreme, if the floor is highly waxed, limit your fancy spins and take smaller steps so you are sure your feet are securely under you; nothing is more embarrassing than landing on your rear end in the middle of the floor.

Last, but not least, choreograph according to the crowd on the floor: Just because you know all those fancy moves, are agile enough to do flips, or just learned a new combination in a class, doesn't mean there is room on the floor to practice. If the floor is crowded, you have to stick to steps that you can control. Look for an opening in the crowd to attempt a fancy move, but be prepared to abort if the space closes up; never sacrifice your partner for the sake of a move. Even though we all should know the principles of courteous behavior, they bear repeating:

Rules of Courtesy

- Every dancer has a right to a space on the floor, whatever her/his level.
- When you are teaching or practicing a step, move off the floor to the corners or side room.
- If you have a collision, it is courteous to apologize even if it is not your fault.
- It is impolite to say no when someone asks you to dance unless you really do not plan to dance.
- Please, no lit cigarettes or drinks on the dance floor.

Many of us also do some smooth dances (fox trot, quickstep, two step, waltz) that travel around the room. They have a few additional

those transgressors again; they can always fine someone better to dance with and someone who won't mistreat them. The beginner dancers might get disgusted and leave dancing altogether.

Perhaps it was the tone of the dance? The incident that provoked this article/editorial happened in a place where West Coast Swing is very popular. West Coast Swing has been touted as a very "sexy" or "sensuous" dance and some guys who flunked English in high school probably translated that to mean "sexual". No, it wasn't the dance because this happens in other dances. Don't try to deny it because I dance in different dance circles and I hear the same horror stories. If you ever get into these uncomfortable situations, talk to your dance teacher about how to dance "defensively"...and don't dance with that particular partner again.

It's outrageous that some guys will treat their partners, particularly strangers, this way. If nothing else, it'll give the followers a bad taste and they just might find other activities to do where their personal space wasn't violated. It also hurts the dancing of the nicer leaders because their partners spend their time "protecting" themselves instead of enjoying the dance. What would be a good rule to follow? Okay, how about this? Would you pull that move if you were dancing with your mother? :-P

PS: If you found this article interesting, you might want to read my other [article](#) which covers many other issues from the dance floor.

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rules about dance floor etiquette:

Rules of Movement

- Line of dance goes counterclockwise around the room.
- Do not stop in the line of dance; if you must stop, move out of the way.
- There are two lanes on the dance floor; the outer lane is for faster moving couples and passing, the inner lane is for slower moving couples, or dances with stop-and-go movements.
- Swing, line dances, and other non-travelling dances should be done in the middle of the floor.

And a word about teachers: When we go out, we like to dance, just like you; please come ask us--we won't criticize your dancing! We are also glad to answer questions or help if you are stuck on a specific step. But please, if you want to learn a brand new step or variation, come to the free lessons at the clubs or the classes/workshops we offer elsewhere.

Remember, good dancecraft and floorcraft have nothing to do with your level of dancing or the number of steps you can execute. They are about making dancing enjoyable for all by being careful, courteous, and fun dancers.

And finally, **a third element**, which I'll call **BODYCRAFT**, just to be consistent.

Especially in the warmer weather, it is extremely important that we make our bodies as appealing and danceable as possible. NO--I'm not talking about going to the gym or getting a tan, although who could complain if you did? Rather, I'm talking about not grossing out your partner with overly sticky, sweaty, smelly bodies. So again, here are some rules of thumb.

- Don't eat onions/garlic/spicy foods just before dancing. They come out your pores as well as on your breath.
- Bring at least one change of shirts if you sweat a lot. I've been to many a four-shirt dance. Both your partners and your body will thank you. Using a little powder helps make shirts removable, and is refreshing as well.
- Be generous in your use of deodorant and powder.
- Beware of skimpy tank tops or backless outfits that make your partner put their

- sticky hands on your sweaty back.
- Bring a small towel to wipe your brow, neck, or hands as needed.

We all want to have fun and look oh-so-good on the floor, so think a little about what you're doing, who you're with, and who else is on the floor, then get out there and enjoy the dance.

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